



Testimony of Xavier Gordon
Appropriations Committee Public Hearing
February 16, 2022

Good evening, Chairwomen Osten and Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Xavier Gordon and I am President of AFSCME Local 269 which represents workers in the Department of Labor. I have worked at the Department of Labor for over thirty years and have seen continuous changes that have hurt the agency. Throughout my career I've seen the DOL offices shrink from 19 in the state to now only 5 American Job Centers and 2 appeal division offices. It is not uncommon to hear complaints about the lack of offices or the distance that members of the public travel to get assistance.

In 2015, DOL laid off 120 employees and closed offices due to budgetary concerns. As part of the closures we lost call centers and further strained the staff. This was a detriment to our customers. Once we lost our Call Centers, we truly gave up the immediate capability of dialogue. They lacked the ability to have human to human conversations with DOL staff who were professionally trained to explain how their benefits affected their day to day lives. Then in March 2020, we were declared essential employees and it was all hands on deck to process unemployment claims. We saw privatization and outside vendors used to assist with federal and state programs for unemployment. Outside vendors had access to confidential employer information and personal identifying information rather than the security of having state employees process the information. Did our Connecticut citizens know this? Were they aware that their private information that was in the hands of non-DOL employees who were not as schooled or as vigilant as state workers were?

Now we have another crisis coming up in July with an expected retirement wave. Privatization and automation have not made our services better. DOL staff continues to be stretched thin, working tirelessly to keep up with the demand and lacking the ability to utilize all of their tools in their tool boxes, like the Call Centers and instant messaging through Live Chat. We should use this as an opportunity to build up staffing levels in the Department of Labor and work to improve services to the public. I can tell you from experience that keeping this work in-house and improving staffing will benefit the public and help us provide the services that the public needs while protecting their most guarded information.

I hope that we can make this a reality this budget and help the workers in DOL who have continued providing services through a very difficult time.

Thank you for your time and consideration.